6: Ó Súilleabháin B-4, 5 (no date) 1956 ER6 Rural Irish ER6

In Tuosist the reason given to me by my father and some other old people was that ill-luck would fall upon Kerry and especially on the parish of Tuosist, if the Corkmen succeeded in forcing the coffin across Leac na gCorp and laid it down on Kerry soil. Sickness, bad crops, and misfortunes of many kinds would follow the corpse, if it were laid beyond the boundary-stone. This is undoubtedly the original reason for the defence of the border on funeral days. A corpse has in many lands for long been regarded as having evil magical power (known scientifically as *orenda* or *mana*) of an impersonal kind latent in itself. In Ireland, for example, fishermen regarded it as unlucky to take the corpse of a drowned person into a boat. Also, *an féar gorta* ("the hungry grass"), which grew wherever a corpse touched the earth, had the power of causing all those who walked over the spot to be stricken with abnormal hunger. Many other instances of the evil power of a corpse might be cited. Just two hundred years ago, Morty Óg O'Sullivan, a native chieftain of Béara in West Cork, who had fought against the British both in Ireland and in many European countries as a member of the "Wild Geese", was slain outside his own house near Eyeries in Béara. The British took his body to a warship at Bere Island and dragged it through the sea in the wake of the ship about sixty miles to Cork. A poet who described this happening wrote the couplet:

Ní raibh aon rath ar an uisce ó Chorcaigh go Béara
Ó tairngeadh tríd an bradán gléigeal.[1]

No fish were said to have since been caught in the sea-route through which the corpse was dragged.

In Sweden, Miss Louise Hagberg tells us, if a corpse were carried over cultivated ground or over lakes, they became thereby unfruitful, and crop-growing fields lost their vegetation. She also says that during the Middle Ages those persons over whose lands a corpse was carried unlawfully had the right to compensation; in Västergötland anybody who carried a corpse across the land of another, without the permission of the owner, rendered himself liable to a prescribed fine.

Thus, the funeral-boundary customs in the Cork-Kerry area, which have died out only in comparatively recent times, seem to fit into the wider pattern of custom and superstition devised to give protection against the magical evil power associated with corpses.

2. Wearing Clothes for the Dead

In the year 1918 or so, an uncle of mine died in the townland of Fehanagh, in the parish of Tuosist, in southwest Kerry. This is my native parish. Jerry Sullivan was my uncle's name; he died at the age of sixty-four. I was fifteen years old at the time, and was spending some weeks of my summer holidays at my uncle's when he became ill and died. I was allowed to remain in the house during the illness, wake, and funeral.

It is still the immemorial custom in that parish to get a suit of clothes specially made by a local tailor when a person dies. The suit is not worn by the corpse in the coffin. Still, it is intended

[1] There has been no luck on the water from Cork to Béara
Since the gleaming salmon was dragged through it.

764 294 292 specifically for the dead person; I will describe in a moment the use to which it is put. Even though the dead person had a new suit of clothes at the time of his death, which he had never worn, but which he had ordered and got made for himself, this suit will not serve the purpose I mention, after his death. Still another new suit must be ordered immediately the person dies, and must be ready for wear on the Sunday following his death. There are certain rules which are *de rigeur* as far as the suit is concerned: (a) it must not be made to measure—the tailor would know most of the people of the parish and would have made clothes for many of them from time to time; when, therefore, a suit is ordered by the relatives of the man who has died, the tailor knows fairly well what the measurements of the deceased were, and makes the suit accordingly; (b) the material used in making the suit must be of good quality—otherwise the dead man will not be properly clad in the next world; (c) the suit must be complete in every detail; (d) it must not be tried on to see if it fits. Stories about events which followed a disregard for these rules will be referred to later.

764 292 When the clothes for my deceased uncle reached the house from the tailor on the Saturday evening after the burial, an interesting ritual was carried out, according to local custom. I remember the evening quite well; it was a very fine summer, and the mountains all around the valley were bathed by the rays of the setting sun. A neighbouring woman, named Mrs. Healy, who lived next door, came to the house of my late uncle at dusk, and asked his wife, children, and myself, to leave. We went some distance away from the house into a field. I heard afterwards from my aunt and from her children that Mrs. Healy then carried out the following rites: She was alone in the house, as I have said, and she first laid out the clothes, garment by garment, on the back of a kitchen chair, which was in the middle of the floor; the underclothes were on top of the pile of clothes, then came the shirt, then the trousers, then the waistcoat, then the coat, then the socks and shoes, and finally the hat and walking-stick underneath. Having thus arranged them, she then called on my deceased uncle three times by name, using the following words: "Here are your clothes, Jerry Sullivan! Come for them, and may you wear them in the next world as they will be worn for you in this!" She then sat down by the fire for short time. She then arose, took the chair and the garments to the threshold of the kitchen, leading to the yard, and repeated the same call and words three times. Having sat at the fireside again for a while, she took the chair and clothes out into the yard, again called three times on the dead man, and returned to the house alone, closing the door behind her. Having allowed some little time to elapse, she went out into the yard, brought the chair and clothes into the kitchen, and put them as they were, in the room at the bottom of the kitchen until next morning.

When she had finished her task, which occupied about a half-hour, as far as I can remember, she called us back to the house, and we all had our evening meal, as if nothing unusual had happened.

Early next morning, at the dawn of day, before anyone else in the house was up, my cousin, the dead man's son, arose, and Mrs. Healy again arrived to complete her task. My cousin went out through the kitchen door, turned round, and knelt on the threshold. Mrs. Healy then placed the suit, still arranged on the chair, inside the open door. My cousin then asked her for each garment in turn, in the name of the dead person, and she handed them to him as he asked for them.

He later put on the suit for Mass, and wore it at the Divine Service and afterwards, until he returned home. Although there was a disparity of over thirty years in the ages of my cousin and that of his father, the resemblance caused by the unusual dress was striking. 764 292

This custom of wearing clothes for the dead is still quite strong in Tuosist. It is also practised either fully, or in varying degrees of decadence, in some of the surrounding parishes, as well as in the south-western part of the adjoining county of Cork. In the Dingle peninsula, further north, in West Kerry, the custom now is to bring a suit of clothes for the dead person in a parcel to Mass on the three prescribed Sundays. A suit of clothes which had already belonged to the deceased suffices for the fulfilment of the practice in some districts in the southwest of Ireland, where, as far as can be judged by the vigour of its survival, the custom had its stronghold. It is difficult to say whether the accounts of the wearing of clothes for the dead in Counties Cavan and Wexford, which I have been given, point to a country-wide distribution in olden times or to the practice having taken hold in these two widely separated counties through some other cause.

The elaborate ceremony carried out by Mrs. Healy after the death of my uncle, which I have described above, was confined to the first Saturday evening and Sunday morning. My cousin took off the suit on his return from Mass on that day, and wore it at Mass again on the two succeeding Sundays, without any preliminary ceremony. Even when a neighbour wears the clothes instead of some member of the household, he must return them to the house on each of the first two Sundays; he may retain them altogether after the third Sunday, if the immediate relatives so arrange. Otherwise they are given to some poor person to wear in the normal way. A neighbour is called upon to wear the clothes only when there is no relative of the deceased who can fulfil the custom, e.g., when the sons of the dead man have emigrated or are too young for the purpose. [602] [621]

Almost everybody in the parish of Tuosist, where, as I have said, the practice of wearing clothes for the dead at Mass on three consecutive Sundays after the interment is still faithfully carried out, is a Catholic, and a large congregation attends Mass every Sunday. After Mass, it is customary for the people to spend some time chatting near the church when Mass is over. They all notice that a certain young man from the parish, as the case may be, is dressed like an old man on three particular Sundays, but, knowing well that he is fulfilling the age-old custom referred to, they pass no comment on it. While the custom of wearing the clothes for adults is still strong in the parish, the Saturday evening and Sunday morning rituals have, however, now died out.

It is evident from the words used by Mrs. Healy in the Saturday evening ritual ("may you wear them in the next world as they will be worn for you in this") that the traditional and original intention of the making of a special suit of clothes in this manner was to provide the dead person with raiment in the afterworld. That the dead were believed to have some kind of continuing existence after passing from this life is also indicated by, among other things, the variety of goods which were buried in coffins with the dead: in Ireland, we have references to such things as food, pipes, tobacco, defensive weapons, tools or implements, watches and other jewellery, as well as money, being placed in coffins in former times. The practice was well-known in other countries also. Prior to the introduction of the special cerements for the bodies of the dead, which have come to be known in Catholic lands as habits, it was customary to fit out the dead for burial in their best clothes. Young unmarried girls were often dressed as brides in Northern Europe, 764 775 292

764 perhaps to indicate that they had become the spouses of Death itself. It is probable, therefore, that
775 the Irish practice of providing, as well as the habit, a normal type of new suit for the dead, is but
292 an extension of the burial of clothes with the corpse itself. The fact that it is pagan in its origin, yet is still carried out by devout Catholics in a parish like Tuosist, who wear the clothes for the dead at Mass on three Sundays after the death has taken place, shows both the tenacity of pre-Christian ideas concerning the afterworld and the easy way in which Pagan ideas and practices were in this, as in many other cases, clothed over with Christian raiment. Indeed, it is possible that the Church itself, may have been instrumental in getting the Catholics under their care to wear the clothes to Mass for a certain number of Sundays with the intention of reminding the congregation of the person who had died and of getting them to pray for his soul.

764 Stories about the displeasure and even the sufferings of the dead whenever the custom of wear-
292 ing special clothes for them was not properly carried out are legion in the areas where the practice was known. I have already mentioned some of the traditional rules which had to be observed in the making and the wearing of the suit. Disregard of any or all of these was believed to give offence to the dead, and the reaction of the deceased to such indifference or carelessness on the part of the living relatives forms the basis of most of the stories. A few examples will illustrate their trend.

764 A man whom I knew well died in Tuosist about thirty years ago. A cousin of his was asked to
787 wear the clothes for the dead man on the three Sundays after his burial, and he agreed to do so.
292 During the week after the first Sunday (on which day the suit was first worn to Mass), a friend of mine, a shoemaker in the district, told me that he had a very vivid dream. He dreamt that he was making his way home along a lonely by-road late at night, and at a certain place, where the dead man had often stacked turf, he saw the dead man sitting with his back to the fence at the roadside. The moon shone down on his face and the shoemaker had no difficulty in recognising him in the dream. Plucking up courage, he saluted the dead man.

"Good night, Dan," said the shoemaker.

"Good night, Tim," was the reply.

"How are you?" asked the shoemaker, knowing that he was dead.

"I'm all right, except for one thing," said the dead man. "They gave me a fine suit and a fine shirt and a fine hat"—and he indicated each garment in turn—"but look at the boots they gave me!" And he pointed at the tattered boots on his feet.

"I'll attend to that, Dan," said the shoemaker, and he bade the other good night and made his way home, very much frightened.

Next morning he awoke with vivid recollections of the strange dream he had had during the night. It was Sunday morning, so he knew that the dead man's cousin would be wearing the clothes for the deceased at Mass for the second time that day. The church was four miles from his home, and having walked the mountainous road to Mass, he joined the congregation at the cross-roads afterwards. Without saying anything to anybody concerning his dream, he kept on the look-out for the dead man's cousin, and when he saw him, the shoemaker went over to join the group of men who were chatting with him. The shoemaker quietly concentrated his attention on the boots which the cousin was wearing, and it did not take long to establish that they

were not new, but had, in fact, been made by the shoemaker himself for the dead man, who had worn them only once before his death. The dead man's wife had apparently thought that it was not necessary to order a new pair of boots to be made. The shoemaker had, however, promised the dead man to have the matter set right, so he quietly sent a message to the dead man's wife next day about his dream. She immediately ordered a new pair of shoes to be procured, and these were worn at Mass, along with the rest of the outfit, until the traditional rule had been fully observed.

764 787 292

A friend of mine in the parish of Clanlawrence in County Cork told me the following story to illustrate how carefully the details of the practice must be observed. A woman in that parish had a son who died. She got a new suit made for him, to be worn at Mass on the three Sundays after his burial, and on the Saturday evening prior to the first Sunday she laid the suit (as Mrs. Healy had done when my uncle had died) on the back of a chair in the kitchen, sprinkled it with holy water, and called on the dead son to come for them. Having next placed them at the threshold of the kitchen, she finally left them for a short while in the yard, and sat by the fire for a moment, presumably to allow the dead son to come for the suit. Suddenly she heard something being thrown against the door and, on investigating, she found that it was the new waistcoat. She then remembered that she had deliberately refrained from putting her dead son's watch in the pocket, intending to keep it as a memento. Needless to say, she immediately put the watch in the waistcoat pocket and replaced the garment on the chair in the yard. There was no further disturbance.[1]

764 294 293

[1] For general references to the custom mentioned in 1, see: När Döden Gästar, Louise Hagberg, Stockholm, 1937, pp. 331–379. Also, Über Krankheit, Tod und Jenseitsvorstellungen in Irland, Hans Hartmann, Halle, 1942, pp. 11–115; and Der Totenkult in Irland, by the same author, Heidelberg, 1952, pp. 15–17, 183.

[113]

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
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Kilmore

"Constitutional" diseases.—Phthisis and struma are stated to be comparatively rare. 164

Malignant disease is very common in the Mullet, especially in the electoral district of Binghamstown South, which includes all the southern part of the peninsula. The majority of these cases are said to fall into the hands of "cancer curers," who use arsenic paste.

Rheumatism is one of the most prevalent troubles, especially in the elderly and old.

"Gravel" is a common complaint all over the district, and a good many deaths from this cause are registered.

Dietetic diseases.—Digestive troubles are very common everywhere, but more especially in the inland parts where the dietary is less varied; "boxty," or potato-bread and the abuse of strong tea seem to be very largely responsible. 164 292

Along the coast, ento-parasites, due to the large proportion of fish in the dietary, are of very frequent occurence.

Respiratory diseases.—Bronchitis is very prevalent in the winter and spring, and spasmodic asthma is stated to be not an uncommon affection. 164

Local affections are few and not very serious. Conjunctivitis is common, and much aggravated by the peat-smoke of the houses.

As regards dental troubles, the people are by no means free from these, though as a rule the teeth are even and white, and remain sound until late in life. [142]

"Female" troubles seem to be very common.

Venereal diseases are practically non-existant.

Skin.—Skin diseases are very prevalent. Among these the most common are—tinea tonsurans, eczema, sea boils, and scabies.

Accidental injuries.—Owing to the mode of life of the people and their environment, accidents frequently happen, especially fractures and contusions from falls, bites and other injuries from domestic animals, and burns. [752]

4. *Psychology.*—The difficulties of treating this part of the subject justly are, in the case of a stranger, very great, as his acquaintance with the people cannot be of sufficiently long standing to allow of the knowledge of more than the superficial part of their character, while, in the case of a resident, personal likes and antipathies, and local quarrels or friendships, largely influence his opinions. 181

The following description, though to some extent derived from personal observation, is for the most part obtained from several local

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
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58 not, like an Inishbofin man, consider himself disgraced, nor is he inconsolable.

Engaged couples or newly married people often come in for an amount of attention from the children of the neighbourhood, which, however flattering it may be, is decidedly embarrassing; they are followed about and cheered whenever they appear together. Weddings
585 are occasions of family festivities, and are usually followed by a dance.
533 "Straw-boys" go round to the house on these occasions and take part in the dancing. They are disguised in tall conical-shaped straw
292 masks, adorned with strips of red and green cloth, white shirts decorated with coloured ribbons, and white or red petticoats. The band is headed by a captain and a mate, who enter the house first and declare that they are shipwrecked sailors, and that they have come to dance at the wedding; the captain then dances with the bride, the mate with the bridesmaid, and the rest of the band with the other girls. It is usual to treat the straw-boys to drink, but they often refuse it, and never demand money, or indulge in any rowdy conduct.

591 The young couple usually set up house on their own account, except in the case of the youngest son, who inherits his parents' house and property, in which case the bride goes to live with her people-in-law.

763 When a person is dying, windows and doors are thrown open, and the clock (if there be one) stopped; it is considered unlucky or im-
777 proper for any of those in the house to cry until after the death has actually occured.

764 Wakes are still held in this district, and many of the old observances and games are kept up; but owing to the discouragement of these by the clergy, the people show a great reluctance to give any information on the matter. A good deal of drinking usually takes place on these occasions.

The funeral customs have undergone some change during the past thirty years, but much still remains that is worthy of notice. A grave is not usually dug until the coffin reaches the graveyard, if begun before hand it is never dug on a Monday, or commenced at least, but a start is made, if necessity compels, by raising a few sods on Sunday. It is believed to be unlucky to bury a corpse on New Year's Day, an act
[777] which is thought to bring misfortune to the whole neighbourhood.

The coffin is usually taken out the back door of the house, and conveyed to the cemetery by the longest route. At the graveyard the *caoine* is raised by the women immediately after the religious ceremony

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

and others were ceremonial; some may be no more than simple pastimes prompted by fancy. Rush baskets were in fact made until recently in some of the Hebridean islands for carrying the fishermen's bait and for holding fish. Baskets of birch twigs, dock stems, ragwort and thistles have also been recorded, and it should be recalled that several examples of grass, sedge, and even moss, made in a similar cross-twisted technique have been recorded from Bronze Age burials in Scotland. The cone-shaped hat of rushes or straw made by children (Fig. 86) recalls in shape at least the traditional headdress of the leprechauns, and it may be noticed that tall steeple hats and helmets seem to have been popular among the Irish down to the seventeenth century.[1] In Co. Kerry the rush hats are worn in mock fights and seem to be regarded as helmets.

Of all these rush toys, none is stranger than the butterfly cage (Fig. 70) which is deftly made by bending long rushes, held upright between the fingers, over others placed transversely. One side of the cage may be left open and a dock leaf inserted as a door. The ends of the rushes are bound together to make a handle. This pastoral plaything can be paralleled in many parts of the world: in the cages in which Spanish shepherd boys carry insects, in the little baskets of dried grass which the Indian herd children make for grasshoppers, in the locust traps which Greek boys, Theocritus tells us, used to weave out of asphodel stalks, and even among the nomads of the Gobi Desert, where, when the cicada begins to call in the great heat, 'every child cuts the desert grass to make a tiny cage to hold one of the fascinating tree-hoppers . . . The Gobi baby's rattle, too, is a hollow ball of twisted grass enclosing a large bead.'[2] The Irish rush rattle is provided with two hazel nuts. Some of the leaves and bracelets are plaited with four, six, nine, or even twelve strands, and a nine strand plait is also seen in one variety of three-cornered Briget's Cross (Fig. 85, 3; Pl. 13, 7).

The conical straw masks and the capes worn by strawboys (Chapter XX, Fig. 88) stripped of their gay ribbons, have been compared with the straw dresses of peasants in Spain or China, and, no doubt, they had their practical prototypes in Ireland.

[1] H. F. McClintock, *Old Irish and Highland Dress*, 88.
[2] M. Cable and F. French, *The Gobi Desert*, 100.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

HOME-MADE THINGS

The straw cape placed over the bee-skep (Fig. 69) is a humble relation. Straw masks are worn also by Biddy Boys on St. Briget's Eve, and by the Christmas Rhymers. On St. Briget's Eve, too, a small straw doll (Brideóg) was dressed up and carried from door to door in the south-west of Ireland. A charm of plaited straw known as Bratóg Brighde (literally, Briget's Rag) is carried by the fishermen of Tory Island as a protection against storms (Fig. 70, 5). There was also Briget's Girdle, a two-strand straw rope, a circle with crosses attached, which was passed over the body as a protective charm, by inserting one leg and then pushing the head through on the Saints' Feast Day (Fig. 85).

Before the Irish live-cattle trade developed there had been for some centuries a great export of hides and skins, and if one goes back earlier it becomes clear that these products must have found a multitude of uses about the farm. For a number of purposes where toughness and durability are specially needed animal skin has remained a traditional material, and in old-fashioned mountainy areas the countryman makes a habit of curing the skins of wild and domesticated animals on the principle that 'you never know but what they'll come in useful'. On analogy with the Hebrides, with which Donegal in particular shows close cultural affinities, skin mealbags should have had a place in cottage economy in north Ireland. When grinding corn, a skin was laid on the floor under the quern to catch the meal. Seal skin served many purposes, from plough traces, in Harris, to the covers of curraghs in Donegal. We have descriptions of cured sheepskins serving as windows,[1] and (from St. Kilda) of fowling ropes bound with strips of salted cowhide to prevent them from being cut by the rocks.[2] But it is in the skin tray, the wecht or wight, that one is most likely to see tradition maintained (Fig. 71). The well-scraped skin of sheep, or sometimes of goat, is stitched on to a rim of ash, bog fir or, in the naked islands which have exhausted even their bog timber, a ring of sugan. To secure the skin free of wrinkles is skilled work, and the finished product is not unlike a tambourine: in fact, it closely resembles the Eskimo caribou drum. Irish wrenboys

[1] Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 25.
[2] Martin Martin, *The Western Isles*, 515.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

223 Faeroe Islands[1] were practised in a region which has so many culture parallels with the northern isles.

225 Down to recent times coast-dwellers also took their toll of seals and porpoises. 'We thought more of a seal in those days', wrote Thomas O'Crohan of the Blaskets, 'than of the very best pig.'[2] They were valued too for their skins, which as we have mentioned made covers for the curraghs and shoes for the rock-climbers. Seal hunting was dangerous work, sometimes involving swimming into the underwater caves where they breed. The seal catchers in County Cork wore 'bags quilted with charcoal' on their arms, for the animals let go their hold when they bit on the crunching charcoal.[3] In the Blaskets porpoises were slaughtered after being driven ashore by boats, and then 'everyone was crimson with the blood of the sea-pigs'.[4] The meat was salted down.

226 Crabs and lobsters, like so many other seafoods, are now neglected and even despised, though there are commercial fisheries in areas accessible to markets. Apart from creel fishing they were formerly taken from the rock holes where they lie, either by hand or with an iron hook. In County Kerry one man would hold another under the water with an oar while he searched the holes. The old-style pots or creels are circular, with a flat weighted bottom, sometimes hinged: the principle rods are of hazel or even whin, the woven sides of sally, laurel or heather stems. They vary in pattern from one district to another, as do the round-topped rectangular net-creels which have taken their place almost everywhere (Fig. 76). The lobstermen are a hardy breed, many of them having turned from long-line fishing, and they have kept up the feuds and rivalries to which the long-liners were addicted. In both types of fishing the search for bait is an exacting occupation. I illustrate a special fork used for digging lug worms, and also a mussel rake (Fig. 74).

222 If it is difficult to obtain information about the history of such tools and activities as these, which have been the concern

[1] K. Williamson, *The Atlantic Islands*, ch. 6. [Text continues on p. 232]
[2] T. O'Crohan, *The Islandman*, 99.
[3] E. Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland*, 2, 127.
[4] T. O'Crohan, op. cit., 12.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

527 It was popularly believed that the saint wandered through
776 the countryside on the eve of her feast day. Bread was left on the doorstep, and in some districts it was the custom to prepare a small bed of rushes or birch twigs and place it by the fire so that Bridie might come in and rest. Sometimes the last sheaf of harvest was used for the purpose. In south-western Ireland a
[532] doll made of straw—or decorated churn-staff—was carried
[292] from house to house by 'Biddy Boys', wearing straw masks such as are used by mummers and by strawboys at weddings, and singing songs in honour of the saint. They would solicit
[264] gifts and end the day in jollification. The evening was celebrated
[787] by a supper of pancakes taken from a plate laid on a rush cross, and as on the other quarter-days prognostications were made.
[789] A ribbon or piece of cloth exposed on St. Briget's Eve became endowed with curative powers. It was believed that no work which involved the turning of a wheel should take place on the saint's day. The placing of a periwinkle in each corner of the kitchen likewise hints at a remote pre-agricultural origin for the festival, but it came to be associated with the pastoral promise of spring, of warmth, new grass, lambs and milk. It is said that the saint placed her foot in water on her feast day so that on that day it begins to warm up each year.

St. Patrick is credited with carrying the process a stage further by putting a stone in the water, or alternatively 'turning
[805] up the warm side of the stone'. 17th March marks the end of
[221] winter and the starting-point of work in the fields. The countryman likes to have his first ridge of potatoes planted on that day, and he is not greatly moved by the patriotic celebrations which are anyhow more in evidence in New York and Boston than in Ireland. Traditionally the cult of St. Patrick is strongest in Ulster, where hundreds of churches and holy wells are named in his honour, and according to legend he was reluctantly accepted as patron saint in some of the other Irish regions. They say in
[191] Ulster that Connachtmen speak with husky accents because their forebears stole and ate St. Patrick's goat. Like Columbkille,
[824] Patrick is remembered for his curses as well as his prophecies, for instance he cursed the rushes that pricked him when he rested, so that every green rush has a brown tip.

527 To refer to all the associations of the movable feasts of

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

527 782 the Feast of St. Martin on 11th November. On St. Martin's Eve the blood of a farm animal or fowl was spilled and sprinkled in the corners of the house, on the door-posts and windows, and in the byre and stable. In some areas the blood was also used to make the mark of a cross on the forehead of each member of the household. The flesh was eaten on St. Martin's Day, which is by tradition one of the feast days on which flesh meat is taken.

[292] [285] [769]

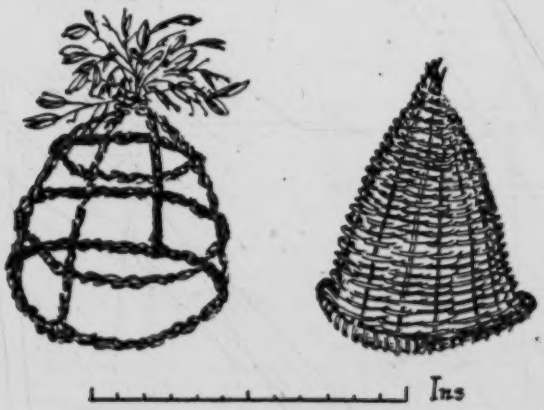

FIG. 86. Hallowe'en caps. *Left:* of plaited straw, Co. Down. *Right:* of woven rushes, Co. Kerry.

We recall that in Scotland a mart was an animal killed at Martinmas to be salted down as winter food, and it may well be that this very practical custom grew out of the cult, which was intended 'to exclude evil spirits for the year'.[1] It seems that seabirds were sometimes killed for the occasion, and there are many superstitions relating to the ill luck which attended anyone who went fishing at Martinmas. Wheel-turning of any kind, whether on cart, mill or spinning wheel, was prohibited. These sacrificial offerings and tabus must be of great antiquity and relate to the preparations for winter. St. Martin's Summer was regarded as the last spell of fine weather before the gales began in earnest. There are hints in folklore that ailing children were

[1] I. Weld, *Roscommon*, 555.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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583 matter of form to make valid the marriage.'[1] After the famine,
[581] at least, the mutual attraction of the suitors themselves was a secondary consideration. An ill-favoured girl could be made pretty with a dowry of cows or its equivalent in cash, known in the west as 'dry-money'. A marriage between near relatives was not unknown if it meant keeping the name on the land or enlarging the patrimony: 'a blanket is the better of being doubled,' it was said. 'We are all related one way or another' is a comment one hears in isolated mountain districts. In general romantic love was the luxury of the landless, but whatever the motives of marriage there were many charms and omens to be taken into account in winning a person's affections, and some of the magic devices to which a girl might resort are listed in one of Bryan Merryman's poems of the late eighteenth century:

[539]

> Up the chimney stuck the flail
> Slept with a spade without avail,
> Hid my wool in the limekiln late
> And my distaff behind the churchyard gate;
> Flax in the road to halt coach and carriage,
> And haycocks stuffed with heads of cabbage.[2]

582 To this day the marriage or remarriage of old men to young women is regarded as unnatural and wrong, perhaps because it complicates the question of succession. In Co. Wexford, and probably elsewhere, unpopular marriages of this kind are marked by noisy gatherings of young men who serenade the married couple with horn-blowing. A similar custom, the *vito*, is well-known in Andalusia, where it includes the ringing of cow-bells and the singing of scurrilous songs. One of the strangest
585 traditional features of Irish weddings is the visitation of 'straw-
● [292] boys', that is youths wearing straw masks who attend as uninvited guests and disport themselves at the dance which normally follows a wedding (Fig. 88). I am told that they may still be seen occasionally in Co. Cavan and parts of the west. Formerly the visitors also wore straw suits or white shirts and red petticoats decorated with coloured ribbons. The leader

[1] Wood-Martin, *The Elder Faiths*, 2, 92.
[2] *The Midnight Court*, translated by Frank O'Connor (1945).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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FIG. 88. Straw hats and dress. (1) Strawboys' wedding mask, Co. Mayo. (2) Strawboys' straw suit, Co. Kerry (National Museum, Dublin). (3) Biddyboys' straw hat, Co. Londonderry. (4) Mummers' straw hat, Co. Fermanagh. (5) Estonian straw hat, worn at Christmas games.

of the strawboys claimed the right to dance with the bride, and they were all well entertained. It seems that they would sometimes claim to be shipwrecked sailors, and whatever the origin of the custom it is evident that disguise was an important element in it.[1]

[1]C. R. Browne, *The Mullet.*

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are worn over dark colored sweaters or blue woolen pullover shirts. Most sweaters are imported, although some of simple design are knitted by women, and shirts are sewn from wool sold in the shops. Under the outer layer of clothing are worn lightweight grey woolen undershirts, known as "grey shirts," and heavier white woolen—"bawneen"—underpants, called "white drawers." The grey shirt is flannel, but the folk use that term to designate homespun wool. Sometimes a bawneen waistcoat is substituted for the vest, and in the heat of the summer may be worn directly over the undershirt. Making up the remainder of the male costume are the ubiquitous Irish visored cap, imported leather or locally manufactured belts and shoes, and stockings. One of the most time consuming chores of women is knitting and darning stockings for their husbands and children.

Just as the vest is the most striking item of male apparel, the red or blue skirt, or "petticoat," is the most striking female one, in particular the red petticoat when viewed from afar against the dull colors of sand and limestone. The skirt, made from imported wool but dyed locally, is gathered and styled with a deep tuck about nine inches from the bottom, and under this in winter is worn an additional bawneen or red skirt. Sometimes a cotton petticoat and knee length "knickers" also are worn, and several layers of cotton "vests" and shirts provide needed warmth beneath the cotton or lightweight woolen handmade blouse during winter. Blouses are styled alike with collars, long sleeves, and buttons down the front, and usually are of subdued plaid material purchased in the shops. However, somewhat unusual designs and colors are admired, as are brooches worn at the neck of the garment. Black knee length woolen stockings and black leather shoes, both procured in the shops, encase the feet. Over the shoulders may be worn a multi-colored or red island crocheted shawl of small size, called a "shawleen." In winter and when attending church, women wear heavy brown woolen paisley or black shawls outdoors which cover the head. The black shawl can be bought on the mainland, but the paisley shawl is no longer available.

Infants of both sexes until toilet trained are clothed in plain bawneen dresses. Then boys don short pants of varying length made from homespun wool, which are worn with white sweaters or blue shirts. Corduroy trousers and jackets are coming into vogue for everyday wear, but on Sunday the white sweater always is worn. Older boys wear long woolen trousers or britches and blue shirts, and children of all ages go barefooted or put on sandals during the summer and add hand knit stockings in winter. Girls past infancy wear frocks sewn by their mothers, bought in the shops, or sent by relatives from abroad. Whether shoes and stockings are worn depends on the weather, and girls don sweaters and coats over their dresses to afford them protection against the cold. Hairbows provide the only decoration.

Underclothing is changed once a week, and women try to wash clothes that often as well. A man has at least one old and one new vest, trousers, and shirt, and on Sunday and for special events he will wear his newest articles of clothing; the same can be said of women's petticoats and accouterments. Winter and summer attire remains the same for both sexes except that some underclothing is shed during the summer, and at night on retiring outer clothing is removed and some

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Numerous factors are weighed by the representatives of the future spouses before a match is consummated. Uppermost in the minds of the relatives of the man is the size of the dowry that the woman will bring to the marriage. In the decade 1951 to 1960, the average dowry was 50 to 60 pounds, but at least one reached 100 pounds. This sum now is used to finance the wedding party, but once it went to provide the passage and "settling in" money for an emigrating sibling, to furnish the dowry for a daughter, or to make life more comfortable for the aging parents. Land and capital (and other status attributes soon to be discussed) possessed by the father or widowed mother of the man are the focal concern of the woman's relatives during matchmaking. Among the factors which enter into the deliberations of both bargaining parties are: the presence in either family line of mental illness or other afflictions which can stigmatize, the economic skills and industriousness of the potential spouses, the number of cognates (relatives on all sides of ego limited only by degree of kinship) which compose the two kin-groups and their propensity to assist and defend (and not to engage in disputes), and the mutual attraction of body and personality of the future spouses. The folk believe that young persons approaching marriage "should have known each other for a long spell" and that "the two should be alike"—as to family position, education, and temperament. It is common for a woman to choose not to marry a man to whom she may be attracted because his mother is overly jealous and domineering, or there are "too many old people in the house."

Most weddings take place on Tuesday during the hour before noon, at the direction of the curate, but at one time they were conducted between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, so that the guests could hurry back to the groom's house "to make a night of it;" the morning ceremony means that festivities commence in mid-afternoon and the party often is "stale by nightfall." Each family invites its circle of relatives and friends who congregate at the respective domiciles in the morning, where the men are served whiskey. The groom's entourage then accompanies him to the house of the bride, and another "round" is proffered them before the procession is formed for the journey to the chapel and back. Three men lead the column at some distance from the bride and groom, to ward off those with the evil eye or any other malignant forces which might threaten the couple. Close behind the bride and groom are the "best man" and "maid of honor," followed in order by the two fathers, male guests in a group, and at the end female guests; the two mothers do not attend the wedding, nor does the bride's mother participate in the matchmaking or allow her daughter to return home until a month following the nuptials (Formerly, she did not enter her daughter's house until a grandchild was born.).

Grooms long have worn mainland attire for the ceremony, but only in 1960 did the first bride do so. Before then, the woman wore a new blue petticoat, accouterments purchased in shops at a nearby mainland port, and a shawl for the first time, draped over the shoulders. Her hair had remained uncut until this day, and she and the groom wore borrowed items of clothing—she usually the shawl and he a coat or tie—to bring luck to their marriage. During the nuptial service, the man not only places a ring on the finger of his bride, but gives her seven shillings with which to buy later a holy picture, or some other object of her

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there's going to be a life hereafter," someone shouted out from the audience, "There won't be.", and the others laughed so uproariously and for so long a time that she had to discontinue singing.

Only Catholics can enter Heaven, so most islanders claim, and among the faithful only saints go directly to Heaven at death, as preordained by God. All others who escape Hell must sojourn in Purgatory, where the temporal punishment of sins previously forgiven must be endured, and the guilt of unrepented venial sins cleared away. Conceptions of Purgatory are vague, but it is felt that severe punishments are meted out there, and that the stay of most Catholics is a long one, even though mitigated by earthly indulgences and penances. Theirs is an example of what some theologians term a "dreary interpretation of Purgatory," with its emphasis on the sinful nature of man. Several times we were told that we would enter Heaven even though not Catholic, because "religions are like canoes which set out on separate courses for a mainland port, yet all reach their destination;" always we were cautioned not to disclose this personal belief to the curate.

The most significant religious events of the year in Inis Beag are certain Catholic feast days, masses performed in homes twice each year, marriages, funerals, visits to the holy well, and several pagan observances. Of the many feast days commemorating the mysteries of the faith and honoring particular saints, eight are holydays of obligation in Ireland: Circumcision, St. Patrick, Ascension, Corpus Christi, Assumption, All Saints, Immaculate Conception, and Nativity. On these days the folk attend mass, abstain from work, and do not conduct business. The feasts of St. Patrick and Christmas among these, and the lesser feasts of St. Brigid, Easter, the patron saint of Inis Beag, St. John, All Souls, St. Martin, and St. Stephen, are considered the most important locally. Although pagan elements are incorporated to some extent in all feast days, reinterpretations are most in evidence in the feasts of St. Brigid, St. John, St. Martin, and St. Stephen, and thus they will be taken up later in the chapter.

Lent in Inis Beag is a period during which men are hard at work farming, and social activities are at low ebb. The laws of fast and abstinence during Lent impose no hardships on the folk in light of the simplicity of their diet, with meat often absent from the table and only one full meal taken during the day as a matter of course. The standard of living in the island is such that for most people there is "too little to give up anything." Many islanders abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages during Lent, and will imbibe only on St. Patrick's Day, March 17th. Following the shipwreck (six days after Ash Wednesday in 1960), when salvaged Scotch whiskey was present in vast quantities, several men who had "sworn off" spirits took to drinking Vat 69 in the privacy of their homes; when the practice became known publicly, they claimed that they were "off the stout" only, which is what most men drink ordinarily because of the high cost of liquor. St. Patrick's Day is much anticipated because it is a holyday of obligation when work ceases, drink can be taken by abstainers, and there is a dance in the boat house in the evening. The dance did not materialize in 1960, because the time of flood tide, when the grounded freighter could best be boarded, coincided with the time of the dance. Before mass on St. Patrick's Day, boys in groups search for shamrocks, which, if found, will ensure the finder "riches" in the future. Women that day wear

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green sweaters, men shamrocks in their buttonholes, and girls green hair ribbons, [292] •
and there is much visiting in the afternoon following a special meal. Women [574]
spend the last weeks of Lent preparing new clothes for their spouses, their children, and themselves, which first are worn to mass on Easter. Eggs are accumulated before the feast day so that each member of the family will have several to eat at breakfast before mass, and in some homes the children gather and hide eggs the week before Easter to see who can collect the most by Sunday morning.

June 14th in Inis Beag is "pattern day," derived from the word patron, 796
which honors the patron saint. Until the 1920s, when suppressed by the clergy, 527
this day and the two days following it rivaled the 12 days of Christmas in fes- 628
tivity. Then it was customary for people from nearby islands and the mainland to visit Inis Beag, and the local folk in turn to attend pattern days in islands and communities in their vicinity. The celebration commenced with the digging out [782]
of sand from the church of the patron saint and from his tomb, or "bed," so that during the night of vigil islanders and visitors could pray while walking around the grave and rest in the church to gain special favor from the saint and from God. The day itself saw masses celebrated in the chapel, and athletic, dancing, and other competitions staged on the strand and contiguous common land. Tents were erected to accommodate vendors of food and drink, as well as solo and figure dancers who performed to the tunes played by visiting musicians of note. Most visitors departed at the end of the day, but those who remained were invited to take part in two more days of revelry in certain island homes, where dancing, singing, and drinking [578]
prevailed day and night. It was the prevalence of factional fighting and promis- [834]
cuous behavior engendered by drunkenness which prompted the church to restrict [273]
the traditional practices of pattern day.

In the 1930s, the priest inaugurated a custom of celebrating mass on pattern 796
day in the church of the patron saint; but it persisted for only two decades, and [778]
today the bed is cleared of sand but the church is not. My wife and I observed
only 11 persons praying and resting during the night of vigil in 1960. Miraculous [789]
cures, appropriately embodied in legends and anecdotes, are claimed for persons who have propitiated the patron saint in this manner in the past, and most of those who still observe the vigil are seeking relief for physical ills. The most recent cures reported are for spinal meningitis, rheumatism, a deformed knee, and an eyeball pierced with a thorn. No work is done on pattern day now, and a dance in the [527]
evening, seldom attended by visitors other than tourists, is the only vestige of the gayety which once marked the day. This dance, just as the St. Patrick's Day dance, did not take place in 1960, even though an accordionist and two other mainlanders came out by *curach* to attend it; the shyness of local girls rather than the tide was the disruptive factor on this occasion.

All Saints is a holyday of obligation November 1st, and is followed next
day by another feast—All Souls. One of the most popular of humorous anecdotes [539]
deals with All Saints' Day in a neighboring island, where once long ago the Church of Ireland pastor gave the day off to men working for him; when ten days later they asked to be off once again for St. Martin's Day, he inquired with seeming pique, "And where was Martin on All Saints' Day?" The feast of All Souls is also 796
a workless day in Inis Beag, although the cemetery is given its one cleaning of the 527
[782]

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796 627 782 year during the early morning. The folk visit the church and graveyard throughout the day and are awarded indulgences for their prayers in behalf of souls of the dead residing in Purgatory. In the cemetery, prayers are offered for relatives, one at a time, and then for everyone buried there, those lost at sea, and those who have no one to pray for them. An islander going to the chapel makes a succession of visits inside to pray, retiring to the churchyard after each prayer; an indulgence is granted for every visit, and some children carry small stones and pile them outside of the chapel to keep count of the indulgences thus acquired. It is said of those who remain longest in the cemetery and make the most number of visits to the chapel that they are attempting to mollify the ghosts of relatives whom they treated badly when alive.

796 The 12 days of Christmas commence with the feast of the Nativity on December 25th and end with the feast of the Epiphany on January 6th, and include the feasts of St. Stephen on December 26th, Holy Innocents on December 28th, and Circumcision on January 1st. This is the high point of the year for the folk, even though it is a much quieter period today than it was half a century ago, when social concerns outweighed religious ones. Work is suspended altogether on Christmas and the three days following it and on January 1st and 6th, and during [167] [582] [574] the rest of the period only "light chores" are done. Importance is attached to the 12 days over and above their religious significance and the fact that little work is done; for at this time emigrants return to Inis Beag on holiday; if a marriage is to occur during the year it is likely to be arranged then; at least one party usually is given which attracts most of the adults; and the men gather in the pubs on [521] several nights to sing, dance, and tell stories. For weeks before Christmas, rumors abound as to which relatives will visit the island, who will marry whom, and where the party will take place; these serve to sharpen the anticipation of the islanders and to make them less mindful of the worsening of the weather.

• [292] In preparation for the Christmas season, new clothes are fashioned—as at Easter—to be worn initially on the five feast days, and it is usual for a man needing [351] [356] a new *crios* to have it woven in time for Christmas mass. Houses and streets are cleaned and repaired, fireplaces whitewashed, and supplies are taken in for the 12 days as steamer service is curtailed. On Christmas Eve, a special dish of [262] [364] corned ling or cod smothered in sauce is served at "Christmas supper," and large white candles purchased in the shops are placed on the dining table and in one or more windows of the cottage, to be burned nightly during the 12 days. The sight from the sea of the darkened island with its hundreds of candles rivals in beauty the view of the mainland coast far away on St. John's Eve, when bonfires are [574] lighted as far as the eye can see. Relatives visit one another after Christmas supper, [431] and when the children have been put to bed, stockings are hung above the fireplace and filled by the parents with oranges, candies, ribbons, pencils, handkerchiefs, [861] and toys for the infants. Santa Claus is the gift giver, so infants are taught, and thus he can be used to promote good behavior on their part in the weeks prior to Christmas; this belief seldom persists into childhood, however, as older children [431] are eager to disabuse their younger siblings of it. Adults usually do not exchange gifts, but they receive them from kin and acquaintances abroad to whom they in [262] turn send Christmas cards. On Christmas Day, special cakes and breads are served